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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 001521

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TAGS: [PARM](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [RP](#) [KN](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: PHILIPPINES PUSHES ASEAN ON NORTH KOREA, BURMA

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) In a frank private July 20 discussion over breakfast with the Ambassador, Philippine Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo expressed dismay at ASEAN's timid stance on issues pertaining to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and Burma. Secretary Romulo related his impression of an informal ASEAN meeting held by the Thai delegation on the margins of the 15th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Cairo July 15 and 16. It was clear, said Romulo, that Thailand and perhaps other ASEAN members wanted to "soft-pedal" the DPRK's recent nuclear test and missile launches. Romulo said he was "horrified" and pointed out to the other delegates that everyone, including China and Russia, had condemned North Korea's provocative actions. He told the Ambassador that ASEAN's reaction to the DPRK showed the same lack of moral courage it has displayed toward Burma, where member states seek to avoid controversy by invoking ASEAN's principle of noninterference in the affairs of other members. Romulo said he told his ASEAN counterparts that they had to stop "soft pedaling" on these important regional challenges if they wanted to be taken seriously on the world stage. The Secretary's comments to the Ambassador are the strongest he has made to date regarding ASEAN's apparent unwillingness to confront difficult regional issues.

¶2. (C) Secretary Romulo said he felt so strongly about ASEAN's lack of resolve in addressing the DPRK's recent actions that, upon his return to the Philippines, he drafted a letter to the ASEAN Chair, Thai Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya, in which he proposes that ASEAN show a united front and "not fudge" on condemning the DPRK's continuing violations of UNSCRs 1718 and 1874. He handed over a copy to the Ambassador, who thanked Romulo for his leadership and perseverance in pressing the Philippines' ASEAN partners to take a stronger and more proactive stand for regional peace and stability. The Ambassador noted that the letter underscores the Philippines' status as a reliable regional partner and offers an opportunity for ASEAN to make progress in dealing with thorny regional challenges such as Burma and North Korea at the upcoming ASEAN ministerial meeting in Phuket. Romulo agreed, and added that he looked forward to seeing Secretary Clinton in Phuket and hoped to be able to speak with her at least briefly on the margins of the ASEAN meetings. The complete text of the letter follows:

¶3. (C) Begin text of letter:

The Secretary of Foreign Affairs
Republic of the Philippines
18 July 2009

Excellency,

Allow me to convey my confidence in Your Excellency's Chairmanship of the 42nd ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, Post Ministerial Conferences, and the 16th ASEAN Regional Forum in

Phuket. With Thailand at the helm, I have no doubt these meetings will yield significant results to benefit not only our region but also the international community.

As Chairman, your voice echoes the ideals and aspirations of the ASEAN countries, as well as the resolve and strength that characterize ASEAN unity. In this regard, I propose that the Chairman's statement during the 42nd AMM/PMC and 16th ARF should not fudge on condemning the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) for conducting nuclear tests and continuously violating UN Security Council Resolutions 1718 and 1874. ASEAN should show a united front, and advance a position no less than the unanimous decision of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, which includes our dialogue partners China, Russia, and the United States.

ASEAN should join the rest of the international community in strongly urging DPRK to return to the Six Party Talks, as this is the only peaceful and diplomatic means to resolve the international threat posed by DPRK's nuclear activities. As President of the 2010 NPT Review Conference, the Philippines will be at the forefront calling upon the DPRK, and thus urges the ASEAN to join the clamor, to abide by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

I strongly believe that a soft statement on DPRK would be a great disservice to peace and stability not only in the Korean peninsula or in the East Asian region, but throughout the world.

Thailand is holding the reins that will steer the ASEAN

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towards greater international preeminence. I understand that it is an arduous challenge, but a robust statement on DPRK is the way to manifest the significance of ASEAN in international affairs.

I express full support for Your Excellency's Chairmanship, and wish you continued success in your official and personal endeavors.

Accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest esteem and consideration.

Signed, Alberto G. Romulo.
KENNEY